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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TOKYO 003520

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TAGS: [EFIS](#) [PHSA](#) [SENV](#) [KSCA](#) [JA](#) [MX](#)
SUBJECT: GOJ AGREES TO LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION
DIALOGUE

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Confidential. Classified By: Charge d'Affaires James Zumwalt
for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

11. (U) SUMMARY: Experts from the USG and GOJ agreed December 11 to continue their informal dialogue and to look at further steps to protect North Pacific loggerhead sea turtles. Representatives from the Fisheries Agency of Japan (FAJ), Ministry of the Environment (MOE), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) participated in this first bilateral government-to-government exchange on protecting this species, considered globally threatened under U.S. law. The loggerheads face threats from nesting habitat degradation, improper ecotourism practices, and bycatch in coastal and open sea fisheries. Greater GOJ engagement is needed to ensure population sustainability and recovery. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

12. (U) The North Pacific loggerhead nests only in Japan, and then migrates across the Pacific, traveling through international and U.S. waters to the Baja peninsula, where juveniles mature in coastal foraging waters, and returns to East Asia as adults. Experts note that this trans-Pacific lifecycle means the North Pacific loggerhead population will neither stabilize nor recover without robust international cooperation. The U.S. regulations have dramatically reduced turtle mortality in U.S. commercial longline fisheries, and cooperative action with Mexican authorities and local fishing communities in Baja has improved juvenile survival rates. Scientists argue greater attention is needed to reduce interactions and mortality in Asian coastal fisheries and Japanese nesting beaches. The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WPRFMC) and USFWS have contributed to efforts by the Sea Turtle Association of Japan (STAJ), a Japanese NGO, to improve nesting conditions and increase hatchling survival.

SYMPOSIUM IDENTIFIES 3 THREATS TO LOGGERHEADS

13. (SBU) Representatives from NMFS and USFWS attended the North Pacific Loggerhead Conservation Symposium at Kagoshima University, visited nesting beaches and conservation field sites, and engaged the Japanese government on protecting loggerheads. The USG and GOJ attendees conveyed the Kagoshima Symposium's conclusions to the December 11 government-to-government exchange in Tokyo. According to the attendees, scientists at the Symposium agreed there are three main areas of concern within Japanese territory: nest productivity and hatchling survival, ecotourism practices, and bycatch mortality.

14. (SBU) During their field visits, NMFS and USFWS representatives saw sea walls and other beach armaments that they noted have exacerbated beach erosion and reduced the nesting habitat available for loggerhead sea turtles, causing females to lay eggs in unsuitable locations, e.g., vulnerable to land- and sea-based threats. The scientists at the Symposium concluded STAJ's nest relocation and protection activities to increase nest productivity and hatchling survival should be expanded, but in the long run, as much beach habitat as possible should be restored to a more natural state, the USG reps told Econoff at a Dec. 10 U.S. delegation meeting.

15. (SBU) At the Symposium and during site visits, local residents told USG representatives their region relies on fishing and ecotourism revenues, a statement reiterated by MOE and FAJ officials during the Dec. 11 exchange. (Note: Tourists participate in turtle walks and hatchling release events on the nesting beaches. The STAJ, MOE, and USG experts believe current ecotourism practices result in depressed nest productivity and elevated hatchling mortality. End note.) Greater oversight and regulation of the local

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ecotourism industry, combined with education and outreach to tourists and tour operators, could alleviate these problems, NMFS and USFWS reps told Econoff. Japan's MOE is engaged in outreach and education, Ministry officials revealed Dec. 11. The U.S. side suggested expanding its scope to disseminate accurate information may be feasible in the near term.

16. (C) Loggerheads are also threatened by the use of mid-water closed-type pound nets in local fishing grounds. However, as the local population ages, some fishing communities are turning to labor-saving mid-water pound nets, the USG reps learned at the Kagoshima Symposium. (Note: Traditional pound nets have an open top, allowing accidentally caught turtles to breathe. Mid-water pound nets have a closed top, accidentally drowning turtles before they can be identified and released. End note.) Currently, the precise extent of the use of these nets is unknown, and STAJ scientists believe they are more prevalent than FAJ officials estimate. The NMFS scientists are working to develop an escape device to retrofit onto these nets because the nets are a major capital investment whose use cannot reasonably be banned, NMFS reps reported. This development may be a promising mid- to long-term mitigation possibility.

17. (SBU) In addition to promoting the conservation activities detailed above, experts at the Symposium agreed on the need for further research and increased GOJ engagement, the USG and GOJ attendees said. Possible research areas identified at the Symposium include 1) characterizing threats and activities at each nesting location, 2) gathering further hatchling success data, 3) understanding bycatch and stranding, 4) investigating the prevalence of mid-water closed-type pound nets, and 5) developing devices to allow turtles to escape from these nets.

GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT MEETING OUTCOMES

18. (C) The U.S. delegation initiated the December 11

U.S.-Japan government-to-government meeting to encourage greater GOJ engagement in loggerhead sea turtle conservation.

The FAJ officials questioned the extent of the North Pacific loggerheads' decline and the prevalence of closed-type pound nets in Japanese fisheries, but MOE officials agreed with the NMFS and USFWS assessment. All parties agreed scientific research and many types of on-shore conservation activities are feasible in the short-run.

¶9. (SBU) The FAJ officials sought USG understanding and patience, emphasizing that major changes, such as habitat restoration, tourism regulation, and fishing practices, involve numerous stakeholders and will take time. The U.S. delegation emphasized the importance of identifying conservation measures that minimize economic harm (e.g. from fishing regulations), and noted that some conservation activities can provide economic benefits to local communities, for example from jobs in ecotourism and habitat conservation.

¶10. (U) Participants agreed to continue informal consultations through the Japanese Fisheries Attache in Washington, to identify joint projects and an appropriate format for regular government-to-government dialogue on North Pacific loggerhead sea turtle conservation.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) The NMFS reps emphasized to Econoff that these talks are entirely separate from the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act of 2007, a law that allows the U.S. to impose trade sanctions on seafood exports from countries whose fishing industry practices fail to protect vulnerable species. Nonetheless, Japan's loggerhead bycatch problem could potentially make Japan vulnerable in the future. Since the United States is among Japan's top export markets for

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seafood products, any such sanctions would be felt throughout Japan's seafood industry.

PARTICIPANTS

¶12. (U) December 11 Government-to-Government Meeting Participants

Japan

MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT:

-- Ms. Fumiko Nakao, Senior Assistant Director, Wildlife Division

-- Mr. Yoshiaki Kitahashi, Assistant Director, Wildlife Division

-- Ms. Yuka Makino, Official, Wildlife Division

-- Mr. Keiji Nakashima, Assistant Director, Natural Environment Strategy Division

-- Mr. Yasuaki Kishino, Subsection Chief, Natural Environment Strategy Division

-- Mr. Takuya Ishikawa, Subsection Chief, Natural Environment Strategy Division

-- Mr. Norihiko Futagami, Section Chief, National Park Division

FISHERIES AGENCY:

-- Mr. Yasuo Fukuda, Director, Ecosystem Conservation Office,
Resources and Environment Research Division

-- Mr. Hideki Moronuki, Assistant Director, Ecosystem
Conservation Office, Resources and Environment Research
Division

-- Mr. Shohei Okano, Official, Ecosystem Conservation Office,
Resources and Environment Research Division

-- Mr. Hitoshi Fujita, Assistant Director, Far Seas Fisheries
Division

NATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF FAR SEAS FISHERIES:

-- Mr. Masashi Kiyota, Chief Researcher, Fisheries Research
Agency

-- Mr. Hiroshi Minami, Senior Researcher, Fisheries Research
Agency

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS:

-- Ms. Kiyomi Hyoe, Official, Fisheries Division

United States

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE:

-- Ms. Alexis Gutierrez, Foreign Affairs Specialist, Turtle
Team, Office of Protected Resources

-- Ms. Irene Kelly, Sea Turtle Recovery Coordinator,
Protected Resources Division, Pacific Islands Regional Office

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE:

-- Mr. Earl Possardt, Marine Turtle Program Officer, Division
of International Conservation

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EMBASSY TOKYO:

-- Ms. Heather Dresser, ESTH Officer

113. (U) The U.S. delegation cleared the substance of this
message after returning to Washington.

ZUMWALT